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Why war in Iraq is right for America

By Ben Shapiro
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It is now clear that the war in Iraq is unpopular. Just last month, 53 percent of Americans felt that sending troops to Iraq was not a mistake. This week, 54 percent of Americans believed that it was, according to USA Today. Two months ago, only 39 percent of Americans believed that war in Iraq had made us less safe from terrorism. This week, 57 percent stated that war had made us less safe.

President Bush has garnered the lion's share of criticism for the situation in Iraq. A full 61 percent of those polled by Newsweek think Bush is handling

the war in Iraq badly; 50 percent state that America is losing ground in its efforts to establish democracy in Iraq. Another poll by AP-Ipsos demonstrates marked doubts about President Bush's honesty, with 48 percent of Americans agreeing that President Bush is honest, and 50 percent disagreeing. Charges of high-handedness are also sticking: 56 percent of those polled say that President Bush is "arrogant."

What has happened in recent weeks to persuade the American public that the Iraq war is a disaster and President Bush is President Nixon? Certainly the media's increased coverage of Iraq has something to do with rising concerns about Iraq. Rumors of the mainstream media's death have been greatly exaggerated.

But something deeper is at work here. Americans are impatient isolationists at heart. We don't want to be the world's policemen. Gaining Iraqis their freedom, as good as it sounds, isn't enough of a justification for war. China is a dictatorship. North Korea is a dictatorship. Saudi Arabia, Libya, Syria, Pakistan and Egypt are all dictatorships. We can't overthrow all of those regimes simply to free their citizens. We have to focus on those regimes that endanger American security. World War II wasn't about liberating Europe, but about protecting America. Vietnam, meanwhile, is a controversial war precisely because the direct threat to America posed by the Viet Cong is questionable.

And so we begin to wonder: Was it worth it in Iraq? Without proof of weapons of mass destruction, can we be sure that Saddam Hussein endangered our security? After all, Iraq didn't attack us – al-Qaida did.

The impatient isolationist mindset has served us well in the past. America is strategically located: a huge chunk of productive land, completely separated from Europe and Asia, bordered by a pacifistic Canada in the north and a weak Mexico in the south. Because of geography and culture, America became a world power; America gained a world empire by sitting still and allowing the mechanisms of capitalism to flourish. During the first half of the 20th century, isolationism was a boon for America: We entered wars late, we suffered comparatively few losses and we were victorious. During World War I, America suffered about 320,000 casualties; the Soviet Union suffered well over 9 million. During World War II, America suffered just over 1 million casualties; the Soviet Union suffered over 20 million.

But now, America faces a crossroads. Since the death of the Soviet Union, we are unquestionably the world's only superpower, the world's remaining empire. Acquiring an empire requires a different mindset than maintaining and expanding one. Empires either decline or they grow. If America is to

survive and flourish, Americans must realize that empire isn't a choice: It's a duty.

Some, like arch-isolationist Pat Buchanan, wish to ignore this simple point. In his tome "A Republic, Not An Empire," Buchanan protests that isolationism should remain America's policy. Buchanan points to British involvement in World War I as the cause of the empire's destruction. No doubt he is partially correct. But it was British indecisiveness that allowed Germany's escalating militarism in the pre-World War I era. And after World War I, Britain remained the world's most powerful empire. The British Empire did not truly collapse until after World War I, when through appeasement and dereliction, it allowed Germany to rearm. It was World War II that signaled the death knell for the British Empire. For an empire, inaction and isolation allow the cancer of rebellion to grow and spread.

That is why impatient isolationism serves us ill in Iraq. Did Iraq pose an immediate threat to our nation? Perhaps not. But toppling Saddam Hussein and democratizing Iraq prevent his future ascendance and end his material support for future threats globally. The same principle holds true for Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Pakistan and others: Pre-emption is the chief weapon of a global empire.

No one said empire was easy, but it is right and good, both for Americans and for the world. Forwarding freedom is always important, but it is especially important where doing so ensures America's future security – as in Iraq. Maintaining American empire will require Americans to recognize the dangers of impatient isolationism.

Ben Shapiro

Ben Shapiro's new collection, "Facts and Furious: The Facts About America and Why They Make Leftists Furious," is available now. Shapiro is a graduate of UCLA and Harvard Law School, host of "The Ben Shapiro Show," and co-founder of Daily Wire+. He is a three-time New York Times bestselling author. Read more of Ben Shapiro's articles here.

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This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.
Psalm 118:24

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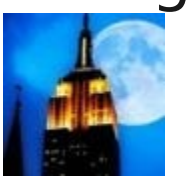
- 

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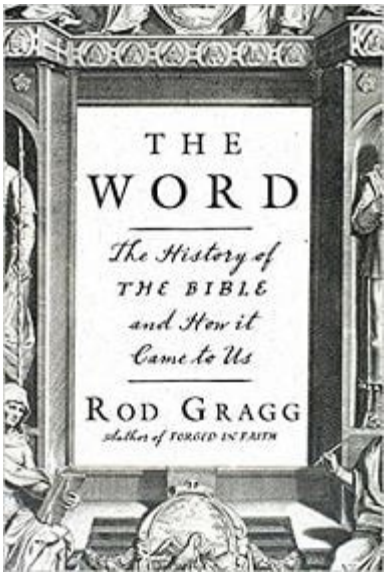

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